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AUTHOR Haasbroek, J. B.
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ABSTRACT

This paper, presented at the International Conference on Education for the Gifted, examines the Republic of South Africa's historical provision of education for the highly gifted as well as the present status of such service. A brief review is provided of the educational planning process and recommendations are outlined for a national system of differentiated education in accordance with students' capacities. Other aspects of gifted education discussed include identification of highly gifted pupils and provision of education at elementary and secondary levels. A summary of some of the recommendations formulated by the Human Sciences Research Council during its investigation into the Republic's educational system are presented. Specific recommendations focus on educational structure, education for the highly gifted, and a research program on education of the highly gifted. The present status of education provision for the highly gifted is then described, discussing the definition of giftedness, identification of gifted pupils, education for highly gifted handicapped pupils and highly gifted underachievers, guidance for highly gifted pupils and their parents, teacher training, and special program development. (JDD)

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Gifted Child Education: Past and Present Dispensation

J.B. Haasbroek, Director, Institute for Educational Research
Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria

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A POSSIBLE BLUEPRINT FOR GIFTED CHILD EDUCATION IN THE RSA

GIFTED CHILD EDUCATION: PAST AND PRESENT DISPENSATION

J.B. Haasbroek, Director, Institute for Education Research,
Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria

1. INTRODUCTION

At this international conference on the education of the gifted, various viewpoints in respect of the education for these children will be presented by overseas and South African experts.

The two papers which will be delivered concerning a possible blueprint for gifted child education in the RSA, should be regarded as an orientation for the audience into the provision of education in the RSA.

The first paper, Gifted child education : past and present dispensation will review past provision of education for the highly gifted as well as the present state of provision in the Republic. The second paper, A possible blueprint for gifted child education to be delivered by Dr J.G. Garbers, President of the HSRC, will present a review of the future educational dispensation in the RSA, with special reference to the provision of education for the highly gifted.

2. EDUCATION PLANNING: A REVIEW

Educational planning and reform in the RSA during the past three decades reveals an increasing awareness of the individual differences between pupils and their educational needs. The various departments of education have progressively provided education in accordance with the educational needs of the pupils.

Education reform was based on investigations undertaken by specially appointed committees. The various committees emphasized that the individual differences among pupils should receive attention in educational planning. The result was that two and three stream systems of differentiated education for mainstream pupils came into operation to provide education in accordance with the pupils' intellectual abilities, aptitudes and interests. The first effort to undertake educational planning on a co-ordinated and national basis, was initiated on 6 May 1964, when the National Advisory Education Council initiated an investigation in the planning of a system of differentiated education.

A Reconnaissance Committee under chairmanship of the Director of the National Bureau of Educational and Social Research (now the Human Sciences Research Council) and comprising a senior official from each of the various departments of education, was established to determine the nature of differentiated education offered by the departments of education for Whites.

The concluding remark in the report of the Reconnaissance Committee with regard to differentiated education and school guidance for Whites in the RSA and South West Africa, reads as follows:" ... all the education departments have not

made the same progress in the field of differentiated education and the methods which are employed differ from each other in many respects. There is considerable agreement as to what should be understood by differentiated education, and all the education departments are convinced of the necessity of differentiated education. The differences come to the fore in its actual application ... It appears to be desirable and essential to start the development of a mutual plan without delay"(HSRC 1970:(3)).

The National Bureau of Educational and Social Research undertook the research to develop a system of differentiated education which would promote the aims of education as such, develop the abilities, aptitudes and interests of the individual, satisfy the manpower needs, and in which school guidance would be an integral supporting service (HSRC: 1970:(4)). The Reconnaissance Committee became the Committee to evaluate the research and to formulate recommendations to be submitted to the National Advisory Educational Council.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION

3.1 THE TASK OF A SYSTEM OF DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION

The Committee formulated the task of the system of differentiated education as follows (HSRC:1970:125):

"(1) to supply pupils with differentiated education in accordance with their capacities, so that they will be able to attain full development;

(2) to supply differentiated education that will link up with the demands which are posed in connection with post-school vocational training;

(3) to give pupils guidance relating to their educational and vocational choices so that the country's manpower needs can also be provided for."

The acknowledgement of pupils' educational needs in respect of their potential, also implies that the highly gifted can lay claim to education to meet their specific education needs.

3.2 THE NEED FOR DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION

The need for differentiated education arises from the fact that although all men are born equal, they differ qualitatively from each other in respect of aptitude, interest, temperament, emotionality and intellectual ability. Individual differences amongst pupils necessitates educational provision to enable them to develop their individual potential to the full (HSRC 1970:149). To ensure that the system of differentiated education would provide for the educational needs of the pupils, it was recommended by the Committee that individual differences in respect of intellectual abilities, personality and social development should be taken into account when planning education (HSRC:1970:150).

3.3 PROVISION FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN IN A SYSTEM OF DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION

The planning of a system of differentiated education also means that special provision has to be made for exceptional pupils, and not only for the mainstream pupils. In respect of special education for the handicapped, a sophisticated system of provision exists in the RSA. With regard to the highly gifted as a group of exceptional pupils, it must be noted that in the Committee's report they were recognized as a group with special educational needs demanding special education provision (HSRC:1970:168-170).

According to the Committee it should be fairly easy in the classroom context to provide for a group of pupils with average abilities. A competent teacher can provide for the individual requirements by means of individualization and by the formation of informal and flexible interclass groupings. It is, however, difficult to provide for the requirements of the highly gifted in the usual classroom context, " ... unless special measures, organisational as well as those dealing with content, (curricula and syllabuses) are taken" (HSRC 1970:169). The realization of these special measures to provide education for the highly gifted, can be achieved only if the highly gifted and their special education needs can be identified.

4. IDENTIFICATION OF HIGHLY GIFTED PUPILS

The realization of these special measures to provide education for the highly gifted, implies that these pupils should be identified to determine their potential in order to interpret their educationalal needs. It was recommended that pupils with exceptional abilities, including the highly gifted, should be identified as early as possible so that special education provision could be made for them, with due consideration for their learning requirements and potential (HSRC, 1970:169). The identification procedure recommended included the following information for identification purposes:

(1) School progress to explore the pupils' scholastic background and achievements,

(2) achievement as measured by standardized scholastic tests,

(3) biographical data to explore the pupils' socio-economic background;

(4) medical report;

(5) personality traits;

(6) aptitude tests results, and

(7) intellectual ability (HSRC, 1970:170).

If this identification procedure is compared with identification procedures nowadays, the resemblance between the recommended procedure and the present procedures is quite clear.

5. PROVISION OF EDUCATION FOR THE HIGHLY GIFTED

The recognition of the highly gifted as a group of pupils with exceptional abilities which should be identified with the view to determine the nature of their giftedness, in order to provide for their education needs, implies that measures should be taken to accommodate these pupils in the system of differentiated education.

5.1 EDUCATION PROVISION ON PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL FOR THE HIGHLY GIFTED

It was recommended that highly gifted primary school pupils remain in primary schools, that they should be grouped in homogeneous class groups if their number warrants it to receive special attention and that individualization should be employed to meet their specific educational needs. Methodological provision should be made by means of acceleration and enrichment. With regard to the subject matter, the content for the highly gifted should be challenging (HSRC, 1970:121-171).

5.2 EDUCATION PROVISION ON THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL TO MEET THE EDUCATION NEEDS OF HIGHLY GIFTED

Differentiated education is provided extensively during the senior secondary school phase. Education in the senior secondary school phase, is offered in accordance with the abilities, aptitudes and interests of the pupils. During the senior secondary school period, which is the last three years of the secondary school, pupils choose subjects which will form a specific field of study directed towards a specific vocational field. To provide for the abilities, aptitudes and interests of pupils, it was recommended that subject groupings should result in fields of study to accommodate pupils according to their aptitudes and interests. Subject groupings resulted in the human sciences, natural sciences, commercial, technical, agricultural, and an art, music and ballet fields of study.

It was also recommended that these fields of study should be provided at specific schools to ensure effective provision of education, or at schools on a comprehensive basis. The types of secondary schools recommended were general secondary schools as comprehensive schools, technical, commercial, agricultural and art schools (HSRC: 1970:181-183).

In order to provide for the individual differences of pupils in the same field of study, the Committee recommended differentiation in the syllabuses of subjects, in addition to the variety of subject groupings in the various fields of study. It was recommended that subjects be offered on an advanced and standard level and that pupils should be encouraged to take as many subjects at the advanced level as they are capable of.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS WITH REGARD TO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION FOR THE HIGHLY GIFTED BY MEANS OF DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION

The research on differentiated education which resulted in the present system of differentiated education which was implemented by all the departments of education in the RSA according to their own specific needs, achieved the following:

(1) The system of education provided for the education needs of pupils in accordance with their abilities, including the highly gifted.

(2) Differentiated fields of study and subject groupings in a specific field of study enabled pupils to choose a field of study in accordance with their aptitudes and interests.

(3) Differentiated syllabuses provided for the pupils' intellectual abilities, by allowing them to choose subjects on a higher and standard level.

(4) The system of education also provided for a procedure of identification to determine the potential of the highly gifted with a view to guiding them with regard to choosing a school career.

Since the implementation of differentiated education, research with regard to the highly gifted continued to elucidate problems underlying the education of the highly gifted in particular. The Institute for Educational Research of the HSRC, universities and the departments of education were involved in research on the provision of education for the highly gifted.

5. HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL'S INVESTIGATION INTO EDUCATION

6.1 REQUEST OF THE CABINET

The second major breakthrough with regard to the provision of education for all the inhabitants of the RSA, occurred on 6 June 1980 when the Cabinet requested the HSRC to conduct in co-operation with all interested parties an investigation into the entire provision of education in the RSA and to make recommendations on:

"(a) guiding principles for a feasible education policy in the RSA in order to

(i) allow for the realization of the inhabitants' potential,

(ii) promote the economic growth in the RSA, and

(iii) improve the quality of life of all the inhabitants of the country

(b) the organization and control structure and financing of education

(c) machinery for consultation and decision making in education

(d) an education infrastructure to provide for the manpower requirements of the RSA and the self-realization of its inhabitants, and

(e) a programme for making available education of the same quality for all population groups " (HSRC: 1981(a):1).

To undertake this comprehensive and intensive research, the Council of the HSRC appointed a Main Committee to be responsible for the research and the report for the Cabinet. The operationalization of the research request resulted in the establishment of 18 work committees each being responsible for a different aspect of education. The extensiveness of the project necessitated this organizational pattern to ensure that all parties involved in education could participate in the investigation.

Principles for the provision of education in the RSA was formulated to serve as the basis of a future system of education and the research to be undertaken. The first and most important principle reads as follows: "Equal opportunities for education, including equal standards in education, for every inhabitant, irrespective of race, colour, creed or sex, shall be the purposeful endeavour of the State" (HSRC 1981(a):14).This principle also implies that the highly gifted can lay claim to education provision to meet their educational needs.

6.2 RECOMMENDED FUTURE EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Main Committee's recommendation with regard to the future educational structure, is extremely important for the education of the highly gifted. In the educational structure a special grade with a duration of 12 years has been created for the highly gifted. Enriched curriculum content with a degree of difficulty much higher than for the ordinary mainstream curriculum, will be offered to the highly gifted from school entrance into the first level up to school leaving in the twelfth school year (HSRC: 1981 (c)87-89).

The fact that the future educational structure provides education for the highly gifted from the first school year, implies that the highly gifted should be identified at an early age to ensure that they will actualize their unique and exceptional potential at an early age. The Main Committee of the HSRC Investigation into Education also recommended that the provision of education for the highly gifted should be focussed on the education needs of the highly gifted and not on the educational system, in order to enable the highly gifted to develop their potential to the full.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS IN REGARD TO THE EDUCATION FOR THE HIGHLY GIFTED

The report of the Work Committee:Education for children with special educational needs (HSRC 1981b : 184-185) came to the following conclusions and recommendations in regard to the provision of education for highly gifted pupils:

(1) There is sufficient research evidence for uniform terminology and also for realizing the importance of identifying highly gifted pupils as early as possible. The identification process is a highly specialized task and during the first stage a panel of evaluators should do the initial identification. During the second stage the identification will be followed up by a more intensive evaluation.

(2) Identification is an extremely difficult task and the necessary psychometric media are to a large extent still lacking. The younger the child, the more difficult the task.

(3) The identification of culturally deprived highly gifted pupils warrants urgent research.

(4) The crux of the provision of education for highly gifted pupils is the designing of education programmes. These education programmes must be aimed at the specific interests of individual pupils and should be designed, as far as possible, for all the school subjects.

(5) One of the promising strategies that still requires much refining and research, is the designing of enriched, individualized interactive computer-based education programmes in specific subjects in order to achieve en-

richment of content, rather than very wide exposure.

(6) The training of teachers for highly gifted pupils should enjoy top priority. It is essential that there should be teachers who, among others, can identify highly gifted pupils, design programmes for them, provide suitable guidance to them and offer them the necessary intellectual exposure" (HSRC 1981(b):184-185).

According to the findings of the Work Committee, the identification of the highly gifted, the development of education programmes to provide for their unique education needs and the training of teachers for the highly gifted should receive urgent attention in order to provide education for the highly gifted effectively. The recommendations put forward by the Work Committee to accommodate these problems areas are the following:

(1) "Directed and advanced courses (preferably in the form of a B.Ed. endorsement) should be instituted on an in-service training basis. Only selected teachers should be admitted to these courses. These courses should train candidates to recognize highly gifted pupils ... to design enrichment programmes on an individualized basis and to orientate them in respect of research on the highly gifted."

(2) "Provision of education for the highly gifted should throughout be made only within and supplementary to mainstream education."

7. THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME : EDUCATION FOR THE HIGHLY GIFTED

The Main Committee of the HSRC Investigation into Education recommended in its report A system of Provision of Education, that research on the education of the highly gifted should be regarded as an urgent matter. Research projects on the education of the highly gifted were identified and brought to the attention of the research community.

Dr P.S. Meyer, Director General of the Department of National Education, submitted to the Minister of National Education recommendations with regard to a research programme on the education of the highly gifted to be undertaken by the HSRC. The recommendations were accepted by the Minister and Dr P.S. Meyer requested the HSRC to undertake the research.

The Main Committee for Educational Research of the HSRC, which was established after the first phase of HSRC Investigation into education was completed, appointed a Wor Committee: Education for Highly Gifted to undertake the research. The Work Committee was requested -

(1) to investigate an education control structure, the identification of the highly gifted, school guidance, curriculum development, and the training of teachers for the highly gifted to provide for the education needs of the highly gifted, and

(2) to formulate guidelines for a system of education provision for the highly gifted with a view to the formulation of education policy.

8. THE PRESENT POSITION IN REGARD TO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION FOR THE HIGHLY GIFTED

Although the existing system of differentiated education with its type of schools, variety of study fields, subject grouping and differentiation in subjects by means of higher and standard grade content and an additional subject that can be taken, provides to a large extent for the educational needs of highly gifted pupils, there are education departments that offer special education for highly gifted pupils, while other departments are still busy with planning in this respect.

In regard to the present provision of education for the highly gifted, the findings of a survey undertaken by the Institute for Educational Research (HSRC: office report 1983) to assist the Work Committee in its research, revealed the following:

(1) The definition of highly giftedness and highly gifted pupils

From documents submitted to the Institute for Educational Research, it is evident that much has still to be done in respect of defining highly giftedness and of categorizing highly gifted pupils, since different viewpoints are held. As the description, definition and categorizing of highly gifted pupils are used as the starting-point of education provision for these pupils, it is important that uniformity on this matter should be reached.

(2) The identification of highly gifted pupils

Different views are held in regard to the identification of highly gifted pupils. It is clear that intellectual ability is not regarded as the sole criterion for the identification of these pupils. The different views in regard to identification and the differences in the nature of the criteria that are applied, require that guidelines be given in respect of the identification procedure.

(3) Programme development for highly gifted pupils

The Transvaal Education Department, Natal Education Department and the Cape Education Department provide special enriched programmes for highly gifted pupils. Since designing education programmes for highly gifted pupils is certainly one of the most important facets of education for the highly gifted, it is obvious that guidelines should be given.

(4) Education for highly gifted handicapped pupils

No special education provision is made for the highly gifted handicapped pupils. The opportunities provided by the present system of differentiated education will, however, enable the highly gifted handicapped pupils to develop their potential. Although the present system of differentiated education provides for the education needs of the highly gifted handicapped pupils, it is certainly important that guidelines be given for the education of these pupils.

(5) Education for highly gifted under-achievers

Some education departments did, however, indicate that cognizance was taken of highly gifted under-achievers in the identification of highly gifted pupils. In view of the fact that the literature clearly states that underachievement is fairly common amongst highly gifted pupils, and as result of this a considerable and significant amount of high level manpower is lost for the RSA, it is of the utmost importance that research be undertaken in this regard so that guidelines can be given in respect

(5) Education for highly gifted underachievers

Some education departments did, however, indicate that cognizance was taken of highly gifted underachievers in the identification of highly gifted pupils. In view of the fact that the literature clearly states that underachievement is fairly common amongst highly gifted pupils, a considerable wastage of high level manpower can be expected (Haasbroek and Jooste 1981: 47-56). It is of the utmost importance that research be undertaken in this regard so that guidelines can be given in respect of education for these highly gifted pupils.

(6) Guidance to highly gifted pupils and their parents

The departments of education providing education for the highly gifted make information available to parents whose children are involved in special programmes. It seems, however, that guidance to pupils and parents should get more attention. School guidance for the highly gifted should be provided to assist them towards self-discovery, self-understanding and towards planning a career in accordance with their abilities. Guidelines in respect of guidance for the highly gifted and their parents are essential.

(7) Training of teachers for the highly gifted

Since 1980 teacher training institutions included modules on the education for the highly gifted in training courses. Except for one university offering a post-graduate degree course, other training institutions do not offer specialized courses for teachers responsible for the tuition of the highly gifted.

Teachers responsible for the education of highly gifted pupils, should be able to identify them, design their programmes, determine the most effective teaching strategies to be implemented, and to plan their education programmes. To enable teachers to handle the education of highly gifted pupils it is important that they should be trained for their task.

(8) Provision of special education for highly gifted pupils

The Transvaal Education Department has implemented in the densely populated areas extra-curricular centres for the highly gifted. Special programmes designed by programme committees, are offered to primary and secondary school pupils. Teachers who are authorities in the subjects offered in the centres and the teaching staff of tertiary education institutions are responsible for the tuition of the highly gifted.

The Cape Education Department implemented the magnet system in seven primary schools and the pull-out system in five. Eleven secondary schools are also involved in this project. The education programmes for these schools are designed by programme committees and the teachers of these schools were trained by means of in-service training programmes for their task. Attention is continuously given to programme development, teacher training and the evaluation of the pupils' progress.

The Natal Education Department implemented the enrichment model in primary schools. In the junior primary school phase highly gifted pupils receive special attention by means of group projects. In the senior primary school phase highly gifted pupils are grouped together in special classes. In secondary schools enriched programmes in non-examination subjects are offered to highly gifted pupils on an experimental basis. Special programme committees are responsible for the development of education programmes.

Although the other education departments have not implemented special programmes yet, education provision for the highly gifted is receiving special attention.

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is apparent that the present system of differentiated education in the RSA makes provision for the educational needs of the highly gifted within the mainstream education dispensation. Although special programmes are not offered, the system provides to a large extent education opportunities for the highly gifted by means of differentiation.

The special measures taken by departments of education since 1979 to provide supplementary education for the highly gifted, is proof of the awareness of the special education needs of these pupils.

Most of the problems experienced with providing education for the highly gifted, will be resolved by the research of the Work Committee: Education for the highly gifted.

The future system of education in the RSA which is based on the report of the Main Committee of the HSRC Investigation into Education, will definitely provide for the highly gifted. Dr J.G. Garbers, President of the HSRC will now discuss the future education system with special reference to the education for the highly gifted.

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